Varieties of Americanism

—John Cogley

THE

Commonweal

China and India:

The Narrowing Gap

by Harold C. Hinton

The Fate of Oscar Wilde

by Vivian Mercier

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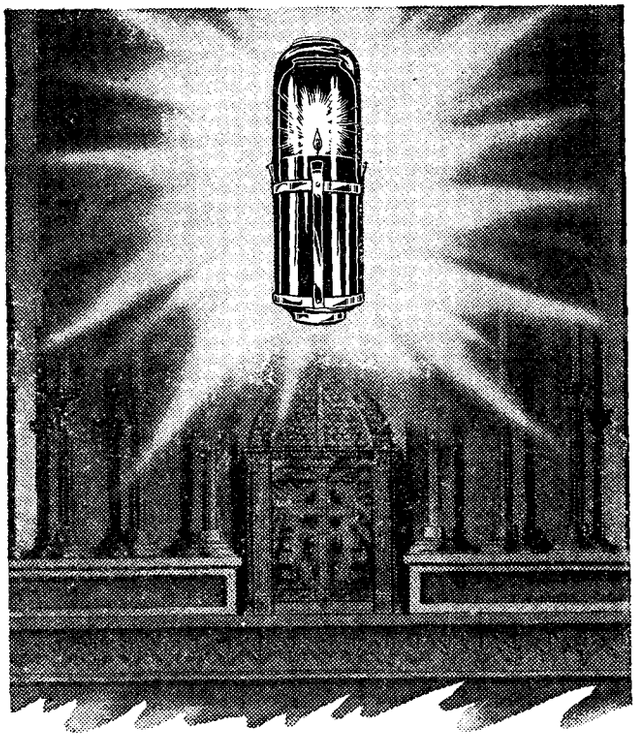

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The Commonweal

week by week

BILLIONS ABROAD

THE scope of the manifold tasks involved in conducting the cold war against the insatiable Communist axis is a staggering one. There is the matter of America's defensive and offensive armaments and the constant pressure to keep them more advanced than our adversaries'. There must also be adequate armament for our allies. And in this connection it is essential to have a universally observed agreement that would deny weapons and strategic materials to our common foes.

On another level there is the matter of building up public opinion in this nation and overseas. This is not only a matter of combating propaganda of the most effective sort, but it also involves a persistent and intelligent presentation of the American and democratic point of view—particularly in those lands where the peoples are as yet adherents of neither of two big power blocs. Propaganda is a difficult and costly operation, at which our adversaries never falter.

We are up against an enemy who much prefers infiltration or subversion from within to marching in force across a neighboring border. Hence the internal condition of country after country is of paramount relevance to the security of the United States and the free world generally. Yesterday it was Burma that required all-out American emergency aid if she were not to fall outright into the hands of the Communists; today it is South Viet Nam; tomorrow it will be other harassed peoples.

Even where there is no immediate threat of a Communist take-over, there is a big job to be done. Untroubled by such bourgeois phenomena as dips in the economic cycle, the Communist world is pressing on. According to the latest figures its annual production is already comparable to that of the United States; it is our European allies and others that supply the non-Communist margin of superiority. The Soviet bloc is moving ahead production-wise faster than we are. It is therefore of key importance for the United States to do everything possible to stimulate the growth of productivity and economic well-being outside the Iron Curtain. Trade policies are involved here as well as loans, technical assistance, immigration policy and outright foreign aid.

In view of the fact that all the above-mentioned activities (and a number of others) are major component parts of our general cold-war policy, it is folly to abandon or hamstring any one of them. Yet that is what many of our vehement self-styled anti-Communists would have us do. At the moment they are in an uproar over a new book by a "newsman, propaganda director, motion picture authority," who flails away at the whole complex of foreign aid and overseas information policies. The new volume is hailed, for instance, by the New York *Daily News* for its smashing attack on the procedure of "squandering" the American taxpayers' billions "in the vain hope of buying everlasting love and affection." That these expenditures stem largely from a desire to defend our own nation seems to have escaped our blunt contemporary.

This big-circulation tabloid cites among the horrors to come the impending visit of Premier Scelba of Italy and his expected presentation of the Vanoni plan, a ten-year program aimed at his country's economic rehabilitation. This serves the *News* as a good polemical example because of past American subventions, the well known strength of the Italian Communist party and the fact that expenditures of forty billion dollars are envisaged in the course of the next decade. The main object is to set up new industries that will absorb Italy's chronically unemployed.

MISTAKES are inevitable in an operation of the range and magnitude of our foreign aid program. Moreover we are not nearly as experienced or adept at propaganda as the Communists. Waste is unavoidable; in the stress of the cold war there is no possible guarantee that all foreign projects or public relations campaigns will be successful. The fifty or sixty billions expended for

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foreign aid over the whole postwar period is a tidy sum; it would buy the American people all sorts of things they could have enjoyed within our borders—at least for a time. So, too, would the billions Washington has felt constrained to spend for armaments since the outbreak of the cold war. But that is hardly a compelling argument for neglecting our defenses.

"Vigilance" is a term that comes readily to the lips of many a super-patriot. Such men would do well to scrutinize its current meaning in view of the relentless adversaries the United States faces and the conditions under which we have to face them. The vigilance of authentic American patriots now encompasses even the far sectors of the globe.

RIDGWAY AND THE NEW WARFARE

GENERAL Matthew Ridgway became Chief of Staff of the Army at the most challenging time in the peacetime history of the United States. The decisions he is forced to make do not have the consequences in lives and deaths that those of wartime leaders have, but for that they are the more incalculable.

What kind of an Army should we have for the cold war? Will the use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield require fewer men, as at first may seem reasonable, or more men—since dispersion will require combat and communications zones several hundred miles deep? A fundamental doctrine of war—perhaps *the* fundamental doctrine of war—has been that a war's outcome depended upon the infantryman's seizing and holding territory. Can nuclear weapons alter that? And if that doctrine is not altered by the new weapons, how can reductions in the size and funds of the Army be justified? Over all of the Eisenhower Administration's military policies hangs the suspicion that the biggest decisions are made by the Treasury Department.

The old doctrine of war has, however, been challenged abroad. An influential school of thought in Britain argues that mass infantry armies are obsolete, and that from now on what will be needed on the ground will be the guerrilla, the commando, the highly-trained and specially-armed airborne trooper who is able to fight brushfire wars and seize the strategic targets in a big war. But if this is true, why are the Western nations building a mass NATO army and rearming the Germans?

General Ridgway is not a conventional infantry general. He was a pioneer in parachute operations and he and his possible successor, General Maxwell P. Taylor (who commanded the 101st Airborne Division in World War II) have both been deeply involved in the experiments in airborne war and the re-thinking of ground operations. If General Ridgway is disturbed by the Army reductions now scheduled—as he testified before Congress—it seems highly desirable that the Administration give the public a counter-argument more convincing than appeals to the rather worn theories of massive retaliation.

"WHO PROMOTED BELSKY?"

FIRST there was the Peress case. Between the Army and Senator McCarthy, this affair turned into a regular old-fashioned free-for-all. The Army apparently did not know what it was doing with its left hand in regard to Peress' security standing while with its right hand it was giving him his promotion—a virtually automatic boost provided for doctors and dentists in his age-and-experience group. Even granting this confusion, it always seemed that the Army was most inept in presenting its basic dilemma in the Peress case; there was an Army side to the case, even if that fact was never got over to the public. But Senator McCarthy charged headlong into the Army-created vacuum, berating, referring to "Fifth Amendment Generals," and before long the basic issues in the case were hopelessly obscured.

Now there is the Belsky matter. Mr. Belsky is a doctor who refused to fill out loyalty forms when his time came for Army service. He was therefore drafted as a private instead of receiving the usual doctor's commission. Fair enough, perhaps, so far. In the Army Private Belsky worked in an Army hospital, doing his work well enough that he was eventually promoted to corporal. This elevation in rank set off McCarthy and his cohorts, and they promptly proceeded to make "Who promoted Belsky?" a junior-grade sequel to their famous "Who promoted Peress?" In the face of this the Army backed down. Corporal Belsky lost his extra stripe, and the officer who promoted him was reprimanded. The Republic was saved, and the outraged patriotic conscience of Senator McCarthy was satisfied—at least for the time being.

What provoked Senator McCarthy and his followers into this campaign? Last year, Mr. Belsky was asked a series of questions about his political affiliations by the Senate Investigations subcommittee; he refused to answer, invoking his Constitutional privilege. In view of the fact that he had refused to answer such questions when facing Army service and had been denied a commission as a result, his continued silence could hardly have surprised anyone. But when the time came for Belsky's

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discharge from the Army, Senator McCarthy demanded that he be given a dishonorable discharge.

That demand from Senator McCarthy was turned down by Secretary of the Army Stevens. If the Senator had evidence, or information from which evidence could be developed, with reference to "any subversive conduct on the part of Belsky," Secretary Stevens said, he should submit it immediately. In the absence of such evidence, the Army held, to give the soldier in question a dishonorable discharge would be illegal.

We agree with Mr. Stevens, but we would go further, perhaps, than he is willing. Mr. Belsky did plead the Fifth Amendment. That is not a crime, and all the rhetoric in the world about "Fifth Amendment Communists" should not be allowed to obscure this fact. Everyone knows by now that there are in the United States a certain number of people who will not take loyalty oaths or who will plead the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination when asked questions by Congressional committees. It may be speculated that many of them, or even most, are Communists, although there are other reasons for which they might invoke the Fifth Amendment, but this remains speculation. We do not know, and no one can know, the facts in each instance. In any case, whether the person involved in a particular case is or is not a Communist, it is an American's legal privilege to plead the Fifth Amendment. We do not think that he should, as a result of so pleading, be subject to extra-legal punishment by the government of the United States —which a dishonorable discharge certainly is.

The government has two choices in this matter, it seems to us. Either one can be followed, but once a course is chosen, decency demands that it be followed consistently, regardless of pressure. First of all, the government could refuse—as it does—to give commissions to people who will not fill out the regular loyalty forms or do not answer loyalty questions satisfactorily. And then the government could go further—as it does not—and say such persons are not wanted in the Army at all.

The Army does not follow this latter course of banning "security risks" entirely, apparently believing such a policy might encourage ordinary, non-political draft-dodgers to refuse to fill out loyalty forms. In the prevailing climate, we doubt that very many men would take this way out of the draft, and beyond that we have our doubts about the long-range usefulness to the Army of persons quite so eager to evade the draft. But whichever decision the Army makes it should stick to; the United States government should not be in the position of trying to have it both ways.

If a man refuses to answer questions about membership in subversive organizations, and the U. S. Army drafts him anyway, he should then be subject to the same rules as everybody else in the Army. To persecute such men, not for their conduct in the Army, but for their political affiliations and opinions before they were drafted, strikes us as manifestly unfair.

There is more at stake here than the fate of one private. What is involved is an elemental sense of decency and fairness in the relationship between government and citizens. If men like Belsky are to be damned if they do and damned if they don't, a fundamental principle of honor and fair-dealing in American life is being violated. The American people expect the government to act vigorously against the threat of espionage and subversion. We do not believe they want the government to confront men like Private Belsky with a stacked deck. If they do, the country is in worse shape than we thought.

MR. MANION'S WORLD

ACCORDING to Clarence E. Manion, Dean of the American Right Wing, the greatest threat to freedom in the modern world is not the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union but the Republican Administration of President Eisenhower. At least, so it seems from his recent speech before a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Chicago. "The only way to prevent Communism," Mr. Manion declared, "is to prevent concentration of power in Washington, not by fighting wars around the world."

Reading these words, we were struck again with the curious make-believe world of all extremist politics—a world in which ideas seldom bear the slightest relationship to reality, in which we are forever urged to battle with windmills while an enemy's army pounds at our gates.

Thus today, the extreme American right, as represented by Mr. Manion, professes to lead the rest of the nation in its opposition to Communism and yet, on most practical issues to defeat Communism, draws back to cry "socialism" or "foreign wars." It is, for example, against "the Reds," but it is also against "give-away" programs and military expenditures. It hates the idea of "peaceful coexistence" but it also opposes war. It exalts the United States as the only hope of the world but thinks the country has been ruined by subversion. Listening to its voice, as we hear it in Mr. Manion's speeches, we can be increasingly grateful for the sanity of President Eisenhower's progressive moderation, which, whatever may be its faults, at least operates in the real world.

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BACK TO IMMOBILISME?

THE saddest thing about the defeat of Premier Mendès-France's government is that it occurred on a vote of confidence on North African policy.

North Africa is not as big a box of high explosive as Indochina was or Formosa is, and the fuse has a while yet to burn, but if it goes off the bang will be big enough to impress the connoisseurs of violence even in our time. Mendes-France was attempting to reconcile the interests of France with the growing Arab nationalism of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. He wanted to keep those territories within the French Union (Algeria, of course, is already a legal part of Metropolitan France and its people are French citizens), and at the same time he wanted to give the Arab residents local autonomy. This policy deeply offended the pride of Gaullist nationalists in the French Assembly and the economic interest of reactionary French colonials—the *colons* who live and work in overseas France.

The Arab nationalists may now be expected to wait a bit and see what the policy of Mendès-France's successor will be. Should a new premier resume attempts to suppress the Arab movements, there will be terrorism on a grand scale, not only Arab terrorism but counter-terror by *colon* vigilantes, patterning their activities on the old American Ku Klux Klan, who in some places are already carrying out violent reprisals against Arabs and against moderate Frenchmen who have tried to meet the Arabs half way.

As for the cabinet crisis itself, what can be said which has not been said before? So long as France is unwilling (or unable, which is not quite the same thing) to revise its constitutional processes so as to give the executive branch of the government enough power to carry out unpopular measures, so long as a government must stand on a rickety framework of personal and party compromises, the fate of France will very likely be perpetual *immobilisme*. Conjurers capable of breaking the pattern are few in number. The one good thing about the fall of the Mendès-France government is that its record has been too spectacular to permit its successor very much comfort in a return to *immobilisme*.

THE EX-COMMUNIST WITNESS

HARVEY Marshall Matusow had a brief time of glory as a professional witness before House and Senate Committees investigating subversion. After being expelled from the Communist Party in 1951, he gave paid testimony against about one hundred and eighty persons and helped secure convictions against thirteen Communist leaders at their conspiracy trial in New York. He also served as an advisor to Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in his investigation of the State Department's overseas libraries.

Now Mr. Matusow says that all this was a fraud. He has filed an affidavit in New York's Federal District Court swearing that he testified falsely against the Communist leaders. His desire for "the type of glory enjoyed by the professional ex-Communist" led him into the role of informer, he says, and in a book called *False Witness,* which will be published in March, he will detail the "fraudulent" part he played in anti-Communist activities. Asked if he now considers the Communist Party conspiratorial, he replies: "I found no evidence of conspiracy in the Communist Party."

Was Mr. Matusow lying when he gave his anti-Communist testimony or is he lying now? Was he, in his "patriotic" days, really a Communist agent planted to discredit Congressional investigations, or is he merely a man with a remarkable capacity for being used? We do not know the answers, but we think some fairly obvious points stand out from his strange story.

For one thing, it is dangerous to accept the testimony and judgment of professional ex-Communists too uncritically. The fact that a man has left the Party and turned government witness is not, in itself, any guarantee of his reliability or his character. The tendency in certain quarters to canonize any ex-Communist who will testify against his former comrades can prove extremely embarrassing.

The case of one Harvey Matusow, however, must not be allowed to destroy the nation's confidence in the credibility of all ex-Communist witnesses. Mr. Matusow, it seems clear, could never have been a reliable witness and the government should never have used him. But besides Harvey Matusow there was, for example, Whittaker Chambers, and few can doubt that his contribution to America's security was a great one, made at great personal cost.

Harvey Matusow was, for a while, a hero of the right. Now he will be a hero of the left. If his various conflicting confessions make the rest of us aware of the folly of too easy hero-making, some good may result for the nation. Like the rest of mankind, the ex-Communist must be judged on his individual merits when he seeks to play a public role. He has no special claim on our attention or loyalty, nor does he have any special claim to wisdom.

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The Narrowing Gap

WHICHEVER SYSTEM DEMONSTRATES ITS SUPERIORITY IN SOLVING KEY PROBLEMS MAY WELL WIN THE ALLEGIANCE OF MILLIONS OF ASIANS

HAROLD C. HINTON

INDIA and China are engaged in a gigantic race whose outcome may decide the destiny of Asia. They are attempting to solve urgent and essentially similar problems—low productivity, ignorance, disease, short life expectancy, and appalling poverty. But they are working by the diametrically opposed methods of democratic socialism and Communist dictatorship. Whichever system demonstrates its superiority in solving these problems, so characteristic of Asia and of all "underdeveloped" countries, may well win the allegiance of millions of Asians with similar problems and wavering ideological loyalties.

The problems confronting these two huge, ancient, and densely populated countries display significant differences as well as striking similarities. India lived restively for two centuries under the rule of Great Britain, benevolent but not always beneficent. From the British she received, in addition to less important and less desirable bequests, a heritage of Western law and political thought, a functioning bureaucracy, a respectable railway system with more than forty thousand miles of heterogeneous track, and an industrial system sufficient to rank her on the eve of the second world war as the sixth nation of the world in terms of gross output. Against these benefits must be set the survival of the caste system and other obstacles to progress, such as a religious veneration for animal life which permits millions of scrawny cattle, rats, snakes, and other pests to roam almost at will, wasting huge quantities of food.

China, on the eve of the second world war, had none of these things. Largely because of a combination of historical accidents, she had escaped colonial rule and had become instead what Sun Yat-sen called a "semi-colony"—a country which no great power controlled, but one in which all the powers held substantial economic and even political concessions. The Kuomintang of Sun and Chiang Kai-shek had imposed on her a political system which was neither free nor efficient. Within her boundaries lay a mere twelve thousand miles of railways, half of them under Japanese control. Her industrial system was microscopic in comparison with her needs and was subject to roughly as great a degree of foreign ownership and control as was India's; in the 1930s the Japanese built in Manchuria alone an industrial complex with a capacity approximately equal to that of all the rest of China.

The second world war likewise dealt less unkindly with India than with China. India experienced a sharp increase in political tension and suffered one very severe famine, but she escaped invasion and emerged a creditor of the United Kingdom rather than its debtor as before. Even the partition of India in 1947 into the new nations of India and Pakistan, which for a time brought the subcontinent to a condition bordering on civil war, dealt no irreparable blows to the legacy bequeathed by the British. China, on the other hand, after twelve years of war, lay prostrate in 1949. Her agricultural production was far below normal; her battered industry was nearly at a standstill, and much of it had been removed from Manchuria by the departing Soviet occupation army; her railway system was virtually inoperative; and the meager political progress so painfully achieved since the Revolution of 1911 had been wiped out by the collapse of the Kuomintang.

Clearly Nehru's India, though far from being a Utopia, began its independent existence with a long lead over Mao's China.

THE Indian Five Year Plan was adopted in 1952. The sane philosophy behind this modest proposal for bettering the lot of India's 360 millions is set forth in the introduction to the Plan:

> Planning in a democratic state is a social process in which, in some part, every citizen should have the opportunity to participate. To set the patterns of future development is a task of such magnitude and significance that it should embody the impact of public opinion and the needs of the community. . . .

Mr. Hinton, a member of the faculty of Georgetown University, has contributed frequently to The Commonweal.

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In this way it was hoped to avoid the pitfalls which beset the path of plans autocratically imposed on peoples from above and to escape the verdict passed on planners by Maurice Zinkin in his brilliant book *Asia and the West*: "Once the right to decide is given to the planners, they always produce a world with too many semi-necessities and too few minor luxuries."

In its final form the Plan visualized the expenditure by the central and state governments of a little over four billion dollars between 1951 and 1956, an amount roughly equal to what the United States spends annually on veterans' affairs. With this sum the planners hoped to raise India's annual national product by about two billion dollars by the end of the Plan; more than half of this amount would be absorbed by growth in population. The increase would amount to roughly five dollars per capita, or 11-12 per cent. Differently expressed, this meager cornucopia would represent an increase of approximately one-fifth in food production, forty per cent in irrigated area, one-half in output of electric power, one-half in steel and pig iron production, one-third in textiles, and comparably modest increases in other fields.

Irrigation, agriculture, and power were assigned the highest priorities, and given India's position as a food deficit area this was a wise decision. Apart from the controversial program of family planning by which the planners hoped to cut down the birth rate simultaneously with the death rate, these improvements in the relation of output to population were to be achieved by modernization of techniques and equipment, expansion of output, compensated land reform, and improvement of village life. Private enterprises, including small-scale cottage industries, were to play a central part.

The Chinese Five Year Plan, which went into effect in 1953, is a very different affair. It was drawn up by a State Planning Commission under the chairmanship of Kao Kang, the recently purged regional boss of Manchuria, which the Chinese Communists intend to develop as their major industrial base. The emphasis of the Chinese Plan lies not upon irrigation, food production, or other matters which would be of immediate benefit to the consumer, but upon heavy industry, mining, hydroelectric development, and communications. Industrial output was to be increased by 23 per cent in the first year of the Plan alone. Private enterprise was to be gradually liquidated.

The type of progress involved in the Chinese Plan will benefit the consumer, if at all, only in the long run, and in the short run will serve mainly to increase the power of the state for more effective control at home—and possibly for further military adventures abroad. The Plan is intended to give China by 1959 a national product equivalent to that of the Soviet Union in 1932. Like their Soviet mentors, Chinese planners generally talk darkly in terms of percentages and eschew absolute figures, so that it is difficult to work out satisfactory data on their economy.

But one matter on which comparison is least difficult is that of budgets. Since 1951 India's total annual budget (including the budgets of both the central government and the states) has shrunk slightly, from about $1.9 billion to $1.8 billion, with a small surplus of revenue over expenditure. The main items of revenue of the central government are customs duties and income taxes; the main categories of expenditure are debt service, civil administration, and defense. The latter item has absorbed more than one-fourth of the central and state budgets combined. This defense expenditure seems surprisingly large, in view of India's self-appointed role as peacemaker for the world. It is to be explained mainly by the continuing friction with Pakistan.

The budget of Communist China, which is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny as is India's, has grown from $8 billion in 1952 to nearly $10 billion in 1954, if we accept the official value which the Chinese Communists place on their currency. Even if we concede the Nationalist claim that the Communists overvalue their currency in terms of foreign exchange by almost 100 per cent, the figures are still impressive, being far in excess both of the present Indian figures and of prewar Kuomintang budgets. The principal items in the Chinese Communist budget are taxes and receipts from government enterprises; the main categories of expenditures are economic construction, cultural expenditures, administration, and defense. The announced budget for 1954 allots only 21 per cent of the total revenue to defense—a suspiciously low proportion, in view of the regime's heavy military commitments in Korea and Indochina, and the sizable amount of Soviet equipment which it has been receiving since 1950. Even the announced proportion, however, would give China an annual military outlay roughly equal to the total budget of India.

In real terms, the present Indian budget is roughly double the average prewar budget. The present budget of China is close to nine times what it was before the war.

A tentative balance sheet is possible on the results so far achieved by India and China in increasing production. The Indian Planning Commission has published a report on the progress of its Plan, admitting that in many respects the results to date have not even come up to the modest standards originally set. The Chinese Communists, for their part, have recently held a Brobdingnagian celebration of the fifth anniversary of their coming to power, in connection with which Premier Chou En-lai has released an

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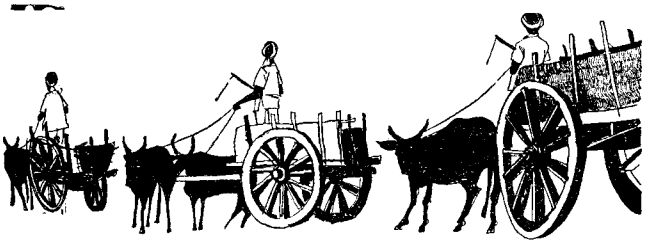
optimistic official version of China's progress during this period.

According to these sources, India's food grain production increased by 10 per cent from 1951 to 1953, that of China by 50 per cent from 1949 to 1954, despite last year's severe floods. India's output of cotton grew by about 14 per cent from 1951 to 1954; China's nearly trebled from 1949 to 1954. The value of India's total foreign trade was nearly the same in 1953 as it had been in 1951; China claims an increase of 80 per cent between 1950 and 1953. India built or improved about 16,000 kilometers of highways from 1951 to 1953; China built 40,000 kilometers of new highways from 1949 to 1953. As for railways, India has so far devoted most of her energies to the improvement of existing lines and the acquisition of new rolling stock, and has built little new trackage; China has constructed 2,740 kilometers of new trunk lines between 1949 and 1953. India increased her output of finished steel by about 10 per cent from 1951 to 1952, but seems to have made little progress since; China claims a 59 per cent increase between 1952 and 1954. Substantially similar figures can be supplied for coal, oil and electricity.



In the middle of 1952, one in every twenty Indians was in a primary school, and one in 65 in a secondary school; the corresponding figures for China at the end of 1953 were one in eleven, and one in 200.

The material upon which these approximations are based, especially the Chinese, is of doubtful accuracy and even more doubtful comparability. It is obvious that the government of India can be assumed to make fairly reliable reports on its actual achievements, while no such assumption can be made about the Central People's Government of China, which is subject to no such inconveniences as a free press or genuine parliament. It is true that some of the quotas set in the Chinese Five Year Plan had to be reduced shortly after the commencement of the Plan, and that 1949 (the base year in some of the comparisons given above) saw China at her economic nadir. For all that, the Chinese Communists claim advances of a similar order over "the best pre-Liberation year" (a date which would vary with the commodity in question, but would in all cases be at least somewhat better than 1949). There can be no certainty that the Chinese claims are not reasonably close to the truth.

EVEN if we take the Chinese Communist claims with a substantial pinch of salt, it still seems certain—and this is confirmed in a general fashion by the reports of non-Communist foreign visitors—that China is making fairly rapid, if brutal, progress toward her announced objective of "the systematic, step-by-step socialist industrialization of the country and the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts, and capitalist industry and commerce." She appears to be rapidly closing the economic gap which until recently separated her from India, and indeed in some fields—particularly those relating to war potential—may well have closed it already. If that is so, she is threatening to outstrip India in the race for the sympathies of Asia's undecided millions, who all too often fail to comprehend the terrible human cost of China's economic gains.

The explanation for what seems to be China's swifter progress may be found partly in the great practical abilities of the Chinese people, but still more in a truism recently stressed by Walter Lippmann with reference to Italy: a totalitarian regime can compel efforts and sacrifices from its people on a scale which no democratic government could demand and survive the wrath of the voters. Where India has had to redistribute land cautiously, on a piecemeal basis, and with compensation to former landlords, China has wiped all her landlords and some of her rich peasants from the map, economically if not always physically.

The Indian government would not dare, even if it wished, to imitate the Chinese by forcibly buying the peasants' grain at fixed—and low—prices and reselling it to the public at a profit through government stores, as has happened in China since the end of 1953. India could not and would not vie with China in using masses of forced, and poorly paid compulsory, labor on public works. Her government has no desire to eliminate private enterprise.

The meaning of China's achievement is all too clear. It means a new strength, a new self-confidence, a new prestige for the most populous nation on earth. It is reflected in Chou En-lai's cockiness at Geneva, and even at Moscow, and in the respect with which non-Communist Asians generally speak of the Peiping regime. It could mean, unless some effective counter-attraction is provided, the eventual fall of the whole Far East under the domination of Peiping. China already holds powerful levers with which to accomplish this purpose, which we may safely assume she regards as desirable. She has the most powerful army of any Far Eastern nation, and behind it stands the still more powerful army of the Soviet Union, which would presumably be available in case of urgent need. She controls raw materials which magnetize the attention of industrialists in crowded Japan, and

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which in time will almost certainly break down the present political restrictions on trade between these two countries. Ten million of her nationals live in Southeast Asia; if won over they can serve as unpaid propagandists and agents for a new Co-Prosperity Sphere, directed this time from Peiping. By contrast, less than four million Indians live abroad, most of them in countries of the British Commonwealth.

THE best insurance against Chinese hegemony in the Far East would be a great increase in the strength and prosperity of the free nations of Asia, and especially of India. Primarily, of course, this must be accomplished by these nations themselves, but outside aid can play a very important role in shoring them up. It is a piece of patronizing wishful thinking to say that what these countries require is technicians, not money. "The perpetual talk that what Asia needs is technicians and not capital," writes Zinkin,

> is . . . futile. Indian railway and irrigation engineers, Indian health experts and electricity engineers have already drawn up perfectly good schemes to cost hundreds of millions. What they need to carry them out is not advice from experts who know nothing of India but, primarily, a great deal of money, and secondarily, a quite limited number of men on the job itself.

India has received only about $400 million from the United States, the Colombo Plan, and the International Bank since the start of her Five Year Plan, and much of this money has been in the form of loans rather than of grants. The Soviet Union has agreed since 1950 to lend China an approximately equal amount of money, and at one time there were said to be some 40,000 Soviet technicians working in China. Does not India deserve better of us than China receives from her parsimonious senior partner? For if India falls into anarchy and then into Communism, the second most populous nation on earth will have joined the ranks of our enemies, and Southeast Asia may well follow in her wake.

India's neutralism in the Cold War and Nehru's arbitrary utterances on matters of foreign policy must not blind us to the fact that any practical alternative to his government would almost certainly be worse. The United States has spent considerably more money in recent years on aid to Nationalist China, or the Philippines, or the Republic of Korea, to say nothing of our European allies, than on aid to India. Surely it is time to remedy this situation, and give India a reasonable prospect of success in her race with China, by an aid program which, for once, is neither too little nor too late.

FROM FRANCE

Mendès-France vs. The Alcohol Lobby

Paris

THE Mendès-France cabinet has fallen on the issue of reform in France's North African Colonies. An underlying factor in its downfall was the alcohol issue. A recent crack was that the Premier would slip "either in the blood of North Africa or the milk of France." It was significant that it was M. Legendre, Assembly spokesman for the sugar-beet growers, who recently led an attack against Mendès-France and François Mitterrand, Minister of the Interior, virtually accusing the former of treason and the latter of complicity.

Under the present French parliamentary and constitutional system it is impossible for a Premier to govern without the consent of certain economic-financial empires, which, in order to protect their vast and out-moded interests, paralyze any program aimed at true economic revival or authentic social progress.

One example is sufficient to show how this works. The history of alcohol in France is a history of folly. The statistics are appalling. Everyone knows the French reputation for fine wines, but there is an annual surplus of production over consumption of more than five hundred million gallons—without counting the wine produced in North Africa. This surplus has to be transformed into alcohol.

But France also produces commercial alcohol extracted from sugar beets, molasses and cereals. In 1953 this production exceeded seventy-five million gallons when only forty-five million were needed. So here is the first absurdity: In order to protect the unfortunate sugar-beet growers, the government buys back from them, at the rate of a hundred francs a litre, a commodity whose real market value is twenty-five francs. There are in addition the famous "private distillers," all those—farmers and others—who are authorized to distill small quantities of alcohol from their own harvests. The increase in their numbers is frightening—from ninety thousand in 1898 to 3,650,000 in 1951. Their annual production of straight alcohol supposedly is ten million gallons, but because of fraudulent reporting of production statistics, it is safe to assume that twice that amount is actually distilled.

When you add 625,000,000 gallons of hard cider and the 200,000,000 gallons of beer annually produced in France, you reach the fantastic total of 22 quarts of

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straight alcohol per Frenchman—or 29 quarts per adult or 47 for each adult male. This puts France far ahead of Italy (16 quarts per adult), Switzerland (11 quarts), Belgium (8), Sweden and Denmark (5) and the United States (4).

Thus it is hardly surprising that there are a lot of alcoholics in France. In 1951 the National Assembly was told that there was one alcoholic in every twenty-five French adults. A report presented to the Economic Council in January, 1954, estimated that fifteen per cent of the adult male population were on their way to becoming alcoholics.

An inquiry by the Ministry of Health recently concluded that a quarter of the hospitalized mentally ill owed their condition to alcohol. Since 1944, and the ending of wartime restrictions on the availability of alcohol, mental illness has been increasing by leaps and bounds. At present there are five hundred new mental cases reported every day. The administrators are swamped; there are but seventy-four thousand beds in our psychiatric hospitals for the hundred thousand victims of mental illness now known to be in existence. New hospitals must be built. But the total cost of a new hospital bed is three million francs, the equivalent of the cost of a house.

There also are marginal forms of psychosis, due to alcoholism, which have grave moral and social consequences: broken homes and terrorized or abandoned children. It is from the pitiful troop of sons and daughters of alcoholics that the unadaptable, the vicious, the prostitutes of both sexes, and from seventy to eighty per cent of the criminals are recruited.

It must likewise be recognized that there exists in France an abnormal mortality rate among men from thirty-five to fifty years of age. This phenomenon exists only in certain countries, and where it does it is always less acute than in France. In comparing a graph of the mortality rate for men between thirty-five and sixty, and the consumption of alcohol between 1921 and 1938, experts found a remarkable parallel.

TO these consequences must be added the annual toll of traffic accidents, accidents at work, and

the loss of production (estimated to be 325 billion francs) due to alcohol. A balance sheet for what alcohol costs France annually would work out something like this: While producing 53 billions in tax receipts, it costs the state 152 billions for hospitalization, relief, social security, the costs of handling juvenile delinquency and expenses to courts. Individual expenditures for alcohol are estimated at 675 billions, to which must be added the loss in national production of 325 billions. And this cannot include the toll of visible and invisible sufferings for which the alcoholization of the French nation is responsible.

One economist has declared that if the activity devoted to the production and sale of alcoholic beverages in France were suddenly shifted to usefully productive work, the French standard of living would immediately rise eleven per cent. The deplorable living conditions and housing of an important segment of the French people would be transformed if a government had the courage to attack what is truly a national catastrophe.

I regret the above avalanche of statistics, but they are necessary to demonstrate the folly of the policies followed by governments which have proved unable to resist the political pressure of the alcohol lobby.

Indeed, everything conspires to impel the Frenchman to drink. There is a constant sales campaign to persuade him that alcohol is a genuine food. Blotters distributed in the public schools teach the young that a litre of wine has as much energy value as five litres of milk or a pound of meat. The state itself sets the example. On the one hand, it appropriates half a million francs a year for the Committee to Prevent Alcoholism, and on the other, fifty million francs for the Committee for the Defense of Wine.

The alcohol bloc is extremely powerful. Some eight million people make a living from the French alcohol industry. Three and one-half million private distillers and a half million dealers together represent a mass of voters almost large enough by themselves to defeat any law against alcohol. No further explanation is needed for the attitude of so many deputies who not only are indifferent to the enforcement of existing laws (in January, 1951, a law was passed permitting the advertising of *apéritifs* with a wine base; in May another law authorized the manufacture of *apéritifs* with a wine base), but would even repeal or modify the anti-alcohol laws passed at the times of the wars of 1870, 1914 and 1940. In March 1946 a regulation limiting the number of licenses for selling alcoholic beverages was abrogated by a show of hands (a process which enables deputies to escape having their vote registered by name in the *Journal Officiel*).

This negligence and cowardice on the part of the public authorities correspond to the attitude of the bourgeoisie, who have now added the American cocktail hour to the French custom of the *apéritif* and the

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liqueur. The peasant drinks because brandy costs him nothing and he is persuaded that alcohol is healthful: in Normandy and Brittany many peasant families still pour Calvados, distilled from apples, into the bottles of their infants on the pretext that it will "kill the worms." And teachers complain of pupils stupefied by the quarter-litre of alcohol which their parents have put in their lunch baskets.

French workers drink almost as heavily. Those who live in miserable and unhealthy dwellings, where the children have not nearly enough room, prefer the consolations of the *bistro* where they find a sense of well-being and warmth which they cannot find in their wretched homes.

AND the wine and alcohol merchants find that the metropolitan markets are not big enough. There is still a vast market to conquer: Africa, in those areas where the Moslem prohibitionists have not yet penetrated or where tolerant Catholicism arrived first. The increase in imports of alcohol by French colonies is fantastic.

In 1951 in West Africa, Togoland, the Cameroons and French Equatorial Africa, a thousand times more alcohol was imported last year than in 1938; twenty-eight times more alcohol than cotton goods, twenty-one times more than sugar and eleven times more than grain. At Douala, wine is drunk directly from the cask by means of a rubber tube; it is paid for on the spot.

The things which can be done to stop this catastrophic decline are these: Suppression of the privilege of private distilling; reorganization of farm production and increased production of table grapes and fruit juices; reduction of the number of alcohol licenses; a ban on *apéritifs* with an alcohol base; education of children, from primary school up, on the dangers of alcohol; and the improving of living conditions by raising wages, the return of women to the home and a bold housing policy.

The Mendès-France government deserves credit for proposing such energetic measures as the ban on serving alcohol before ten in the morning in the cafes, a regulation that bars must close one day a week, raising the taxes on *apéritifs*, allotting one-fifth of the sugar-beet harvest to sugar refineries rather than distillers, and the reduction of exports to the colonies. Some of these measures have been decreed, but most of them have to be discussed by the Assembly on a date not yet fixed.

The trouble is that Pierre Mendès-France will no longer be in office to defend his anti-alcoholism program and his glass of milk for school children. And it is unlikely that his successors will have the courage to put these measures through—even by a show of hands.

ROBERT BARRAT.

THE STAGE

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

"NOT among the best plays," was Sir Desmond MacCarthy's verdict on the initial production; "a somewhat complicated story, which is made the vehicle of a great deal of hilarious, delightful satire on doctors and of some poor criticism upon the artistic temperament and the place of the artist in society." Reluctantly one may acquiesce in the judgment: "The Doctor's Dilemma" has something of the scenario's spare, unfleshed angularity—the mind, perhaps, in its vertiginous speed, outstripping the sensibility elsewhere, everywhere, so fine and particular. After a brilliant opening—the establishment of Acts I and II is masterly—a tremor of vacillation sets in; dramatic control is ever so slightly abrogated. Act III rehearses its moral conflicts with a somewhat schematic and predictable unconventionality; the fourth, despite much beauty, uneasily blends its disparate elements: Shaw's rhetoric consistently refuses an expansion into moral spaciousness. Ridgeon's motives are lost in an ambiguity which is only uncertain, not enriching; Dubedat himself is *fin de siècle* and inexactly observed: the character gives off a thin, hard, metallic ring of falsity. Yet I have dwelt too long on imperfections, real or imaginary: "The Doctor's Dilemma" surmounts them with the thrust and splendor of genius. What I would rather stress is its pertinence at this juncture of the season: the profoundly corrective insight it affords into the nature of essential dramatic experience.

In a recent number of *The Hudson Review,* William Becker—a critic sometimes ill-tempered but always discerning, spirited, knowledgeable—explored with considerable range and penetration the shape of the "new" American play. His attack—on such representative specimens as "The Member of the Wedding," "The Trip to Bountiful," "Take a Giant Step"—was well mounted, the indictment grave; less fortunate were his specific illustrations. One may certainly find in these works evidence of "autotelic character portraiture . . . faulty or non-existent plots . . . dreary repetitions and irrelevancies . . . evasive flights from action and will into mood and sentiment," but one must admit, too, the virtues of these defects, the emotional authority the dramatists are so often capable of establishing. Yet Mr. Becker's larger criticism—that "the characteristics [of the new play] are fast becoming the accepted aims of playwrights on Broadway"—is well taken; one may determine its truth merely by contemplating the nature and quality of the small amount of serious writing offered by television, the work of Horton Foote, say, or of Paddy Chayevsky. Against these dramatic values,

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Mr. Becker vigorously invokes the Aristotelian definition of *tragedy* "as an imitation, not of men, but of an action, and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality . . . Dramatic Action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions . . . Again, if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character and well finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents."

Here "The Doctor's Dilemma" is apposite. It is a play rich in subsidiary interest: in satiric portraiture, in the flinty rhetorical wit which was a mode of Shaw's intelligence. Yet a structural spine of action stiffens all this: not action in the foolish external sense, but action as something put in motion, as choice, consequence, logic. Consider the epilogue. A contemporary dramatist would no doubt find it redundant and literal, would see in it the rupture of a mood induced by Dubedat's death and Jennifer's response to that. Shall we not see it, rather, as but the logical terminus of the situation, the completion of an action which draws about some human relationships a circle of limitation, and makes them—within that sphere—true, gives them a quality of detachment and objective validity wholly independent of the dramatist's mind?

Audacious in its intentions, The Phoenix is luckless again in performance: as drama, this is an indifferent, almost flaccid realization of "The Doctor's Dilemma." Individually, there are successes: incisive bits by Fritz Weaver and Frederick Warriner, Roddy MacDowall's adroit Dubedat, the rosy fatuity of Frederick Worlock's egregious B.B. (at the sound of whose voice, Shaw notes, "even broken bones have been known to unite"). But the center is dead: Shepherd Strudwick's Ridgeon merely graceful, Geraldine Fitzgerald's Jennifer vivacious though curiously insensible. Fatally the production lacks style; what it wants is someone of Cyril Ritchard's perception to polish and refine.

What does not seem to trouble the producers at the Phoenix is a serious regard for the fineness of dramatic expression; they appear content—in this production as in those last of "Coriolanus" and "The Sea Gull"—to establish a rough general outline of the play, trusting to our indulgence to overlook the unfinished places. But surely productions which do not at all adequately represent masterpieces of the past cannot be said to repair the broken link in our culture—the absence of continuity, the isolation from major bodies of dramatic literature. Until policy at the Phoenix deepens in artistic tension and responsibility, it is impossible to contemplate these productions as other than well-meaning but abortive theatrical gestures. (*At the Phoenix*).

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

CHIPS OF THE AULD SOD

JOHN Ford has a field day in "The Long Gray Line" telling the story of Marty Maher who was an athletic instructor at West Point for fifty years. Edward Hope's well-written script, stemming from Maher's autobiography, *Bringing Up the Brass,* is fairly bursting with patriotism and sweet-sad episodes about this Irish-Catholic American who came to the United States in 1903 and spent the years thereafter in helping to turn young men into army officers. Director Ford, who loves nothing more than choking an audience with emotion, almost chokes this one to death. But Ford, who is also a master craftsman at film making, wisely alternates tears with laughter, and visualizes the life of Marty Maher and the training at West Point in first-rate cinema.

Tyrone Power, whose acting ability is often overlooked by admirers, gives his finest performance as Maher—at first the cocky young Irishman green to the ways of this country and the regulations of West Point which he considers more like a prison than a school; and then the good instructor whose teaching goes beyond the gymnasium and playing field; and the good husband to Mary (Maureen O'Hara) who also came from Ireland; and finally, many years later, the lonely widower, who is honored on his retirement from the Army, but not from West Point, by a dress parade of the cadet corps. Power is surrounded by an excellent cast, including Donald Crisp as his father and Ward Bond as West Point's athletic director.

In spite of its being such an obvious tear-jerker, "The Long Gray Line" has caught the spirit of West Point better than any past cinematic splurge about the military academy on the Hudson, and this is not only because this new film has the advantages of CinemaScope and Technicolor. The cadets do not burst into song every few minutes, nor do they make last-minute runs to win football games. When "The Long Gray Line" isn't too busy concentrating on its lovable American Mr. Chips, it manages to convey quite effectively that the young men are there to learn to become officers and gentlemen.

THERE'S nothing sentimental about "The Racers"—except the ending when Bella Darvi falls into Kirk Douglas' arms seemingly forgiving him for being a heel throughout most of the picture. Actually the story in "The Racers" is its weakest point. Moviegoers who couldn't resist "Three Coins in a Fountain" in spite of its insipid story, who ohed and ahed over its magnificent scenery, will find themselves ohing and

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ahing again as they see Italy and elsewhere in Europe elegantly photographed in CinemaScope and De Luxe Color. Since the film is mainly about sports-car racing, there are plenty of racing sequences in it, and I have never seen them better photographed.

The screenplay by Charles Kaufman, based on a novel by Hans Ruesch, is like a minor Hemingway with concentration on the lure of auto racing instead of bull fighting. Kirk Douglas portrays a racer who has an obsession to be first in his field and his conscience isn't bothered too much about whom he has to hurt to get ahead. Why ballerina Bella Darvi should fall in love with this self-centered man isn't made too clear. Director Henry Hathaway skirts away from most of the love scenes, so we know only by inference what gives in this department. But Hathaway has developed the other characters well, especially the racers played by Gilbert Roland, John Hudson, Caesar Romero, and Romero's wife, played by Katy Jurado, the manager of a group of drivers, played by Lee J. Cobb, and the mechanic who works for Douglas, portrayed by Charles Goldner in a performance that is outstanding. Racing enthusiasts will be spellbound by this film. Others, less thrilled by all this death in the afternoon and evening, will have to admire the skillful racing shots and gorgeous panoramic landscapes.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"OBITUARY FOR DISTRIBUTISM"

New York, N. Y.

TO the Editors: In answer to John Stanley's article saying that Distributism is irrelevant [Jan. 14] I would say that it takes more than reading of books and statistics on the subject to see the situation as it is. I am in agreement with the figures which he presents about the trend from the country to the city, and also that fewer and fewer people will take the risk of life in the country, for the city lights and gadgets have much appeal. The NAM says that it is this element of "risk" which built up our American Way of Life. . . .

I do not agree with the basis of his criticism. As I understand it, Peter Maurin and Belloc and the others who advocated Distributism offered this as a way of life in contrast to a cannibalistic capitalism which they saw. This same capitalism is much worse now than they could have dreamed, and is headed toward the destruction of the civilized world in atomic war.

Inasmuch as only a handful of people really oppose this atomic destruction, which is evidently hanging over them like a cloud, how then is it possible to expect any more than a handful of people to appreciate the dream of Distributism which entails risks? For they have the false promises of pensions, full employment, peace and a long line of super-gadgets.

When the debacle of atomic destruction does come then we need people with faith and with energy who know enough to build a new world on Distributist principles rather than to commence the same old dog-eat-dog commercialism which caused their destruction.

Any young couple today who wish to work and live on the land, and who take the pains to learn something of the skill necessary to make a success of it, can find plenty of land with some kind of buildings, formerly occupied by those who left for the fleshpots of the city. Likewise they can raise much of what they need for use and not for market. If they look around they can find one certain crop like honey, garlic, herbs, asparagus, or some such fruit of the soil which is lacking in that particular community, and they can raise these for the small amount of cash they need. But to try to compete in the market with big growers who have thousands of acres and unlimited shipping facilities would bring disaster. I know of a young man in Alabama who had a small nursery in his back yard where he supported himself and his mother by growing just those trees and plants that the big commercial nurseries would not bother about, yet for which there was a demand. I know a family in Albuquerque who made thousands of dollars each year raising garlic on a five acre lot. No one else raised garlic to any extent in that community.

In the same manner a craftsman could make furniture, ironwork, or set up a machine repair shop, or whatever his skill might be, and if responsible as to time and work would have more work then he could do. He would be doing those who came to him a favor and his work would be in demand.

I have proved in the past twelve years that one person can work as a migrant worker and need not be out of a job. I had more calls for day labor than I could fulfil and I thus had more security and more freedom than the government and its capitalist system could give me.

There will not be a mass movement for people to become real Christians, pacifists, anarchists, socialists, or anything else except to be slaves of a Communist or a Fascist promise of an impossible dream. All this change must come about as Tolstoy said when bees left a swarm up in a tree. They had to leave a few at a time: those on the outside who saw the light left first and thus made room for the others to see that the tight ball of swarmed bees was not the real world but true chaos. It is this one-man or one-family revolution that is important. So let us be about it, and with prayer too.

AMMON HENNACY,
The Catholic Worker.

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Varieties of Americanism

LAST month Robert M. Hutchins spoke before the National Press Club in Washington. Americans, he said, are growing more and more like the man who said that there were two things he hated: intolerance and Jews. He offered some recent examples:

"We all smiled at the decision of the commandants not to permit West Point and Annapolis to debate the entry of Communist China into the UN and applauded Mr. Eisenhower's sensible observations. We went away feeling good, forgetting that West Point and Annapolis are not permitted to debate the entry of Communist China into the UN.

"The Illinois Department of the American Legion has repented, I hear, of its brutality to the Girl Scouts; but the Girl Scouts revised their Manual as the Legion demanded.

"We were pleased to notice that Bishop Oxnam was 'cleared' by the House Un-American Activities Committee; but he is not allowed to speak at the Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles.

"We assert that the Fifth Amendment is one of the brightest stars in the crown of our liberties and proclaim the inalienable freedom of every man not to testify against himself, conveniently overlooking the fact that almost everyone who has declined to do so is now unemployed . . . .

"It comes to this: we must ourselves adopt an un-American attitude because if we don't we may be regarded as un-American by those who have an admittedly un-American attitude. We are all dedicated to the great American tradition, but the battlecry of the Republic is, what will people say?"

Characteristically, Dr. Hutchins touched a nerve. But the question remains, why are things this way? No one can escape the fact that Americans—articulate Americans in any case—tend more and more to bloc off into two factions. Dr. Hutchins himself ably represents one of these two factions. A man like Clarence Manion—to pick out another erstwhile Midwestern educator—or the leaders of the American Legion, which distributed Manion's book by the thousand, carry the ball for the opposing team. Both teams venerate the same patriotic scriptures and reverently invoke American tradition, but clearly they are moved by contradictory images of what America should be.

The Hutchins image is of the nation fashioned after the startling propositions about political freedom in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. The emphasis here is on procedures and the "democratic method." In the Washington speeches, for instance, Hutchins said that the essence of Americanism is found in the words "feel free." He told the newsmen: "Our ancestors came to this country because they wanted to feel free. They developed laws under which they and we could feel free. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the amendments extending the suffrage —these are expressions of the American conviction that everybody should feel free. The limits of this feeling or this freedom are not to be found in a formless fear of public opinion. On the contrary, public opinion is to grow and change through the free discussion of all points of view."

The other group envisages the ideal America as a nation wholly and unequivocally dedicated to a series of doctrines which are lumped together as Americanism. "Americanism," as Dr. Manion describes it in his book *The Key to Peace* (enthusiastically endorsed by Norman Vincent Peale, Clare Boothe Luce, Karl E. Mundt, etc), is a full-blown philosophy of man (he is a creature of God), of government (it is a "necessary evil" and the less of it the better), and of economics (free enterprise—men have not only a natural right but a natural duty to acquire private property).

Along with these and some other fairly rigid dogmas, Manion's Americanism also provides for freedom of speech to preach contrary dogmas or no dogmas at all, though this aspect is muted somewhat. But here is the rub. If such and such a dogma is the very essence of Americanism, free enterprise, say, is it then "un-American" to preach against it? I suspect Dr. Manion would answer yes. To preach atheism, statism or socialism—if I read his book right—would clearly be "un-American." But, according to Dr. Hutchins, it is the very essence of being an American that a man should "feel free" to preach atheism, statism or socialism if he is so inclined.

Dr. Manion would say that one cannot propound these "subversive" ideas and still believe in Americanism. Dr. Hutchins would say that one can believe in whatever one chooses—and what's more should feel free to advocate it publicly. The Hutchins version of American orthodoxy is only concerned with the fact that no American should feel burdened because his opinion or belief is off-beat, unpopular or at variance with Dr. Manion's—or with Dr. Hutchins' own, for that matter.

These separate understandings of "Americanism," it seems to me, lie at the root of many embittered controversies. And it has been in the vain hope of keeping both Dr. Hutchins and Dr. Manion happy that the Eisenhower Administration, which is so utterly dedicated to being moderately progressive, has so often managed to please neither one of them.

JOHN COGLEY.

(This is the first appearance of a regular column to be contributed weekly by Mr. Cogley, until recently Executive Editor of The Commonweal.)

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The Fate of Oscar Wilde

VIVIAN MERCIER

THE centenary year of the birth of Oscar Wilde has come and gone without offering us a definitive biography of this playboy of the western world. One can readily understand why. The self-righteousness that so pitilessly condemned Wilde during his lifetime has since been answered by an equal and opposite self-righteousness on the part of his defenders. For instance, R. H. Sherard's well-intentioned *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris and Oscar Wilde* was such a polemic as to be almost unreadable. Nor have Wilde's attackers entirely given up, if one can trust the reviews of St. John Ervine's recent appraisal.

Probably because of the atmosphere of sensationalism surrounding the subject, English-speaking scholars have neglected to provide the necessary groundwork for a biography of Wilde. Allan Wade, the bibliographer and editor of Yeats' correspondence, has just undertaken an edition of Wilde's letters; let us hope that his established reputation will encourage all those who possess letters to bring them forward. A complete edition—or at least a complete census—of the surviving letters constitutes an indispensable first step toward the kind of biography we need.

What an unsuspected cache of correspondence may mean to a biographer is convincingly demonstrated in an appendix to Vyvyan Holland's touching, forgiving autobiography, *Son of Oscar Wilde* [Dutton, $3.75]. Here we have thirty-three previously unpublished letters from Oscar to two Oxford friends, Reginald R. Harding and William W. Ward, together with a college reminiscence of Wilde by the latter. If these are at all typical of what Wade's edition of the correspondence has in store for us, most previous estimates of Wilde's personality development will have to be drastically revised. So far, Wilde's defenders seem likely to fare better than his detractors, at least where his early life is concerned. Furthermore, several of these letters are masterpieces of informal communication, making us regret once again that Wilde's marvelous conversation fell silent before the days of tape-recorders.

The Oscar Wilde these letters show is very different from the popular misconceptions of what he should have been in college days. He yearns for "earnestness and purity" and complains that some of his undergraduate friends talk "nonsense and smut." He is passionately attracted to the Catholic Church and critical of his mother's agnosticism. He is devoted to the memory of his recently dead father. "Awfully good" at the new game of lawn tennis, he is also a confirmed fisherman, a powerful swimmer and a keen shot. He proudly lists his catches of salmon and trout and enjoys shooting hares in Connemara and partridge in County Longford. He pays tribute to the charms of any number of pretty girls. His favorite English poem, after "Hamlet" and "In Memoriam," is "Aurora Leigh" by Mrs. Browning. His own devotional poetry is being published mainly in Catholic periodicals. All in all, here is a young man who seems perfectly normal, except in so far as he is superior to most men of his age in energy, intellect, sensibility, religious feeling, and all-around appetite for every sensual and spiritual good that life has to offer.

BESIDES affording psychological insight, these letters supply valuable chronological data about a relatively crucial period in Wilde's life, the Easter vacation of 1877, when he intended to go straight to Rome again, in the full expectation of there making up his mind to enter the Catholic Church. Instead, his former Trinity College, Dublin, mentor, Professor Mahaffy, persuaded him to pay his first visit to Greece. Pagan Athens ill prepared Oscar for his delayed return to Christian Rome; stopping there on his way back, he seems to have found himself no longer ready for conversion. In all the excitement, he arrived something like a month late for the beginning of the Magdalen College term, incurring a heavy fine and suspension for the rest of term. The remaining letters of the series take on a more somber tone.

The series as a whole must convince the conscientious biographer that he ought to hold off until all the evidence is in; meanwhile, he can best occupy himself by helping to ferret out the available evidence and making it known in short articles or editions of unpublished documents. The general reader who has just developed an interest in Wilde had better content himself with Pearson's book, correcting its too favorable view of Lord Alfred Douglas by a reading of Vyvyan Holland's complete, authen-

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tic edition of *De Profundis,* Wilde's only major fragment of autobiography. Such a reader can also enjoy and feel confidence in *Son of Oscar Wilde.* Mr. Holland's account of the needless suffering visited upon himself, his elder brother and his mother by sanctimonious relatives—in addition to the heartless, mindless behavior of the general public—is illumined by the memory of many kindnesses done to him for his father's sake or his own, as well as by a brief glimpse of Oscar as a loving, playful father—a demi-god to his sons.

THE biographical situation, then, is currently in a fluid state, though Wilde has been dead for nearly fifty-five years. Can we say the same of the critical situation? I think we can. Mr. Woodcock's book, published here by Macmillan in 1950, seems to herald both the end of one phase of Wilde's reputation and the beginning of another. After being completely denigrated for a while both as a man and as an artist, Wilde went through a period during which his work was extravagantly overpraised, while his life was politely ignored. Then followed a time when everyone enthusiastically echoed Wilde's own famous remark to Gide: "I have put my genius into my life, only my talent into my works." Wilde's life and Gide's both came to be regarded as magnificent experiments in complete individualism, in "living dangerously," rather than as compulsive fulfilments of bad heredity or acquired neurosis. The critical estimate of Wilde's literary work declined steadily, however: he was accused of sentimentality, of overelaboration, of insincerity, even of intellectual deficiency. The wit of "The Importance of Being Earnest," which had so far resisted all assaults, was now spoken of as "dated." To be funny was, in the thirties, to be out of fashion.

Mr. Woodcock's book in part belongs to this phase of Wilde's reputation and in part passes beyond it. Wilde, in Woodcock's view, "was clearly a greater personality than a writer," mainly because he aimed at nothing less than becoming a universal genius. This extravagant ambition led Oscar to develop every facet of his divided, paradoxical character:

> "Each man," declares Wilde, "should seek to make himself perfect, but he can do this only from within, by living in the personal world that has been given to him and by following his own inner laws and impulses."

To this one belief he held consistently in all his apparent inconsistencies of life.

Yet Woodcock, in spite of Wilde's divided energies, considers that "there are few writers of his time whose work stands out so much from the mass of Victorian literature by its distinctive quality." In other words, Wilde is no longer regarded *merely* as a personality; some of his work, in the opinion of many critics besides Woodcock, is bound to survive. I think no one would disagree with the judgment that "Wilde was at his best in dialogue"; what else would one expect from such a master of conversation? "The Importance of Being Earnest" will surely last, if nothing else does.

One of Mr. Woodcock's judgments, that Wilde "is to be seen most significantly as a critic, though in the orthodox sense he was hardly a critic at all," parallels my own views. Before my belated discovery of *The Paradox of Oscar Wilde,* I had been reading widely in *The Works of Oscar Wilde* [Dutton, $4.95]. This one-volume edition, abominably edited by G. F. Maine, has been in print in England for fifteen or twenty years, though first published in America at the end of last year. The reader is hereby warned not to accept any fact, date, or Greek quotation in this volume (printed in Great Britain) without independent confirmation.

Giving up the plays in this compendious publication as too familiar, the fiction as too slick, and the poetry as too derivative, I finally sank my teeth into the critical essays and dialogues, reading all except "The Rise of Historical Criticism," an erudite and rather forbidding early work, first published after Wilde's death. Since one or two of these half-dozen lengthy essays and dialogues may survive longer than anything else of Wilde's except the comedies and (for some readers) the fairy tales, I should like to end this survey of Wilde's present status by drawing attention to some of the treasures hidden in them.

THE most valuable, I think, is "The Decay of Lying," a sparkling Platonic dialogue between two young men, Cyril and Vyvyan (the names of Wilde's sons), who would not be out of place in any of the comedies. As its title suggests, the leading speaker, Vyvyan, launches a witty attack on the entire realistic school of literature. Some of its witticisms are familiar to us, without our knowing, perhaps, just where they come in Wilde's works: "Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty . . .;" Zola's characters "have their dreary vices, and their drearier virtues . . .;" Wordsworth "found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there." In appreciating their wit, we tend to overlook the fact that most of Wilde's critical judgments were fundamentally sound. What he says about the inevitable limitations of realism will always be true.

"The Critic as Artist," a less successful dialogue because it is longer and more repetitious, also contains wonderful flashes of wit, like the too-famous "Meredith is a prose Browning, and so is Browning."

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This comes at the end of a long paragraph which, far from belittling Browning, takes full account of his strength as well as his weakness. The vindication of the critic in this essay might well be adopted as a motto by the New Critics, for it justifies their practice, if not their principles: ". . . criticism of the highest kind," says Gilbert to Ernest, ". . . treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself . . . to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final."

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism" surprises us, not by its vindication of individualism—which we expect from Wilde—but by its vision of a future in which man, liberated from economic pressures by socialism, will be free to develop his individuality to the utmost. Wilde also saw, as the socialists of his day did not, that socialism could prove a stepping-stone to totalitarianism instead of to liberty. Through most of the essay we might be reading Shaw, though Shaw could not have written: "The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace."

I have not sufficient space here in which to examine Wilde's Shakespeare criticism ("The Truth of Masks" and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."), more paradoxical and perverse than even Maginn's or Shaw's. Nor can I more than glance at the fatal confusion between life and art which causes him in "Pen, Pencil and Poison" to admire Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, author and painter, forger and poisoner: "This young dandy sought to be somebody, rather than to do something. He recognized that Life itself is an art . . . ."

Reading those words, we think of Wilde himself, as we do again when Wilde praises the "curious courage" Wainewright showed in suing an insurance company for not paying up a policy he had taken out on the life of one of his murder victims. It took the same kind of "curious courage" to sue the Marquis of Queensberry for libel when he accused Wilde of posing as a homosexual. Can we doubt that both Wilde and Wainewright, unconsciously guilt-ridden, longed for their own destruction?

These are not the only examples of unconscious prophecy in the writings of Wilde. When we remember how he himself suffered and what Mr. Holland tells of the suffering inflicted on the innocent Constance Wilde and her children, we think of these words from "The Soul of Man Under Socialism":

> As one reads history . . . one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted. . . .

One Man's Journey Towards Universality and Truth

THE GOLDEN STRING. By Bede Griffiths, O.S.B. Kenedy. $3.50.

By ANNE FREMANTLE

GREAT autobiographies are among the rarest, as they are among the most poignant and valid, of human documents. Even in this age of literary spate, in the hundred years since Cardinal Newman's *Apologia* there have been but a handful—one thinks of those written by Samuel Butler, Edmund Gosse, Henry Adams, Lincoln Steffens, George Moore, Lionel Trilling, and Thomas Merton. It is with the last of these that Bede Griffiths' book will inevitably be compared, though Dom Bede is a good decade older than Father Louis, and as English as the other is American. Indeed, Bede Griffiths epitomizes the travail not of one soul only, but of one people in one epoch—the best of the British middle class between the wars. Nothing could be more ordinary and obvious than his circumstances; nothing more unique than his experience.

He was born on December 17, 1906 into the urbanized middle class. His father seems to have been gentle, melancholy and unsuccessful; his mother, deeply religious (Low-Church) Church of England. He had a happy childhood—one of those English country childhoods that are partly the cause of England's Cincinnatus complex. The greatest statesman, the most successful lawyer, actor, writer, tycoon, in England longs to go back to bird-watching or growing roses. And sincerely—because the too-happy, too-brief childhood, that ends with a segregated boarding school at seven or eight, proves early and finally that life is not the dream.

Yet Bede Griffiths endured no horrors at school. He became a "Blue-Coat boy," a scholar at Christ's Hospital, the severely Protestant school founded by Edward VI, where Coleridge, Lamb and Leigh Hunt were educated. And also St. Edmund Campion and Dom Augustine Baker, the author of *Holy Wisdom*, a Benedictine mystical treatise. (Dom Bede never knew of these two fellow scholars until after his conversion—Catholic names were never mentioned at school; they were, as his father put it, "beyond the pale.")

It was in his last term at school that one evening Bede Griffiths went out alone and heard the birds singing in "that full chorus of song which can be heard at that time of the year at dawn or at sunset . . . . It seemed to me that I had never heard the birds singing before." That "incomparable pomp of eve" of which Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, was to him what was to Thomas Traherne the "orient and immortal wheat, that stood from everlasting to everlasting." From that day to this, "that search for God which began for me, on that

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evening at school has gone on . . . . For the more one discovers of God, the more one finds one has to learn. Every step in advance is a return to the beginning, and we shall not really know Him as He is, until we have returned to our beginning, and learned to know Him as both the beginning and the end of our journey."

Dom Bede went up to Oxford, to Magdalen, on an exhibition, and took Classical moderations, and then switched to English Literature, because he had come to distrust the intellect, to have little faith in philosophy, " . . . in intellect and reason altogether. I thought that intellectualism was the disease from which we were all suffering." C. S. Lewis was his tutor, "at that time no more a Christian than I was." Lewis had already got over the romantic phase Bede Griffiths was wallowing in, yet nothing rational he then offered appealed to the young mystic, seeking to renew an emotional experience in which his whole being had seemed to blend with the life of nature. Keats' life of sensations rather than of thoughts, and his creed "I believe in nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination" became his.

In that post-World War I Oxford, so wonderfully described in its corruption by Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited,* young Bede Griffiths kept miraculously pure. He credits D. H. Lawrence with teaching him the "holiness" of sex and Tolstoy with making him see in the peasant and the primitive, a "holiness" of the whole of life that made the prospect of earning his living in a town unendurable. At Oxford's end he returned to philosophy, reading Descartes with no harm, and Spinoza with great profit, Berkeley with delight, and Coleridge with a beginning of recognition of the level at which poet and philosopher can be reconciled. With Dante and St. Augustine, both read in the original, came an appetite for "the whole life of virtue . . . Dante was a greater poet [than Shelley or Keats] because he was a greater lover than they."

And, meanwhile, Bede Griffiths and two friends, newly gone down from Oxford, had bought a stone Cotswold cottage and begun that experiment in the simple life which was to determine the course of all their very different three lives. The experiment lasted less than a year; its indelible effect is wonderfully shown in Dom Bede's book. "Of course we were not pretending that it was possible altogether to go back to those earlier conditions of life" he admits, and that admission saves his book from any Eric Gillish affectations. For what he and his companions sought was not a way out, but a way in, and that road is always open.

Two most remarkable things stand out in this astonishing chronicle. One is the total divorce from the Church of the average Englishman. When Bede Griffiths was finally ready to become a Catholic, he had no idea where a Catholic Church could be found; he did not know, and had never met, a single Catholic. Never, until shortly before his conversion, had it entered his head that the Roman Mass had been said in the pre-Reformation English Churches; he had no idea that the missionaries who converted England were sent from Rome, or that England until 1570 acknowledged the supremacy of the See of Peter. He knew the Book of Common Prayer, and naively thought its prayers original; nor realized whence came the collects he loved until *after* he had been received into the Church.

The second astonishing thing about this chronicle is how an adolescent moment of mysticism, such as most boys enjoy around puberty, grew in Dom Bede's case into a vocation. As Simone Weil says, in all the accounts of God's dealings with men, it is He Who seeks, man who is sought; and only after He has marked his prey, does man reciprocate. We love Him because He first loved us; and Dom Bede's account of how he came to realize this is the climax of his book.

"Now I suddenly saw that all the time it was not I who had been seeking God, but God who had been seeking me. . . . All the beauty and truth which I had discovered had come to me as a reflection of His beauty, but I had kept my eyes fixed on the reflection and was always looking at myself. But God had brought me to the point at which I was compelled to turn away from the reflection, both of myself and of the world which could only mirror my own image. During that night the mirror had been broken, and I had felt abandoned because I could no longer gaze upon the image of my own reason and the finite world it knew. God had brought me to my knees and made me acknowledge my own nothingness, and out of that knowledge I had been reborn. I was no longer the center of my life and therefore I could see God in everything."

The experiments he made, with fasting, with prayer, and the relish he found in asceticism, are not less exciting than his realization of the value of the three great pre-Christian books, the Bhagavadita, the Dhammapada and the Tao. His description of Sankara, the great doctor of the Vedanta, whose view of God "is almost identical with that of St. Thomas," and his comment that "in the Hindu conception of the Atma and the Chinese conception of the Tao we have perhaps the most profound of insights into the mystery by which mankind has been prepared for its final revelation in Christ" are part of his own appreciation of the fact that perhaps the most urgent of all the contemporary tasks of the Church is to bring into her truth, as St. Thomas brought the truth of Aristotle, these great pre-Christian Eastern statements of the "perennial philosophy." Dom Bede writes eloquently that we must learn not only to reject error, but as Augustine put it, greedily [to] accept truth wherever it is to be found."

And any truth that is outside the Church is a limitation of her universality, and a reproach to Christians. So, too, Dom Bede cites the truths "by which error lives"—the truths which, isolated, are heresies; these too, he says, must be restored in Christ to the Church: the profound spirituality of the Orthodox, the sense of the inner light of the Quakers, the devotion to the Bible

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of the Protestants; all these, he insists, must come home to their unique source.

Bede Griffiths is astonishingly truthful. It is very hard to write quite honestly, and, for example, his account of his belief that he would find in the greater austerity of Cistercian life, greater opportunity for holiness, tallies with that given by Father de Foucauld, who found the Trappists miserable sybarites because they cooked their vegetables with some sort of oil instead of plain water, and fled to found a severer order in the desert, or that of Thomas Merton, whose continual temptation for many years was to rush off to the Carthusians for the same reason. Dom Bede was given permission by his superiors to visit a Cistercian monastery. "This was to give me one of the greatest lessons of my life . . . . It was not that there was anything wrong" with the life he found there "but simply that I had been beguiled by my imagination. I realized then that the will of God was not to be found in following my own desires, however spiritual they might seem, but by seeking to adapt myself to those circumstances in which by Divine Providence I actually found myself."

What Bede Griffiths has, by God's grace, become, can only be guessed at dimly by those who read his book; but that already is a convincing, and a vastly rewarding, experience.

Noblesse

THE HONOR OF GASTON LE TORCH. By Jacques Perret. Translated by Anne Cliff and Fernand G. Renier. Norton. $3.50.

By JOHN F. SULLIVAN

IF, in our time, the military and political reputation of France has sadly declined from glory, in the things of the spirit the French flavor remains characteristically dazzling and indefinable. At best, one can only compile a list of its ingredients: the witty rationality of a comedy by Molière, the grace of a good dry wine, the wry humor of a movie with Raimu or Fernandel, the intellectuality of a Maritain, the gay irresponsibility of a surrealist poem, the urbanity and elegance of Anatole France, the light and charm of Paris itself. It is because it shares, in its degree, these qualities that *The Honor of Gaston Le Torch* is so essentially and unmistakably French.

This first of Jacques Perret's novels to be translated into English is a marvelous tale—generated perhaps by the imagination, perhaps by the potency of that good dry wine, perhaps by the very contrariness of Time—of the adventures that befall Gaston Le Torch, old soldier and last of a line that has long and faithfully served its country. Gaston has been devoting his retirement to a compilation of the naval and military glories of his forebears. But one day he comes upon a shameful blot, a stain on the family honor that has gone unavenged for two hundred and fifty years. One Eugene Le Torch, commanding the thirty-two gun frigate, *La Douce,* had, on the eighteenth of October, 1697, miserably turned and run from a smaller English vessel.

Gaston's heroic attempts to redeem the name of Le Torch lead him eventually back to the deck of Eugene's rather piratical frigate, in that fateful October of 1697. It would be unfair to try to recount here the wondrous events that follow, and it is impossible to convey any idea of the bouquet which characterizes the flashing, kaleidoscopic conversations that swirl giddily about Gaston.

Perret's novel needs no more excuse for being than that is is gay and rollicking, almost at times a parody of more pretentious historical novels, providing through its all too brief course comic entertainment on a high, sweet, witty level. But there is a theme beneath its sparkling surface which is apt to come sliding back into your thoughts after you have finished the last laughing page. It is the saddening theme of the decay of men and manners in our drab and low-hearted times.

Gaston, being of our times, had much to learn from the gaudy company on board the fantastic *La Douce*. But if he did not understand, for example, the true importance of a hat or the mystic nature of a mainmast, he was no hollow man, for he had lived and fought, and once he had exchanged his overcoat of somber and perhaps Satanic black for the more highly colored costume of the seventeenth century, he had little difficulty in making himself at home.

And if, in the end, Gaston did not fully understand, as perhaps none of us are able to understand, what happened on that eighteenth day of October, he was at least able to rejoin, for one more adventure, some old friends, nameless veterans of ancient and modern wars, the grimy fighting men who man the ships and trenches, whose ways are not different whether they make up Roman legions or atomic artillery crews. These men, together with the faith and honor and love and life that animate them, are among the things that have endured.

Hurt and Haunted

A WORLD OF LOVE. By Elizabeth Bowen. Knopf. $3.50.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

ONE of Elizabeth Bowen's favorite themes is the process of disillusionment in love, the death of the heart; more than that, the shame of reflecting that a world of love has all along been ignorantly wasted. In her newest novel, Miss Bowen works a difficult variation. The romanticized ideal is a man long dead, and therefore no subject of an ugly discovery; instead, the fantasy that he has engendered in the minds of three women suddenly fades out. And—what makes the writer's performance more difficult—the story goes on from there to show the women's attempts to direct their feelings toward the real, flawed world within reach.

It is a major technical problem

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in fiction, the Change of Heart, and it has been cheapened to such an extent that many modern readers find it embarrassing even when seriously and intelligently handled. It is part of reality, however; we ought to be willing to accept some good along with the bad. The event is modestly but successfully fitted into the total structure of *A World of Love*.

This version of the problem is suited to certain of Miss Bowen's capacities and limitations. She is adept at tracing the psychological vibrations of a love affair from a woman's point of view and cautious in her treatment of male characters. Here she has a situation where her women can be in love with a man who does not exist; it makes a workable combination, in this case at any rate. Miss Bowen can devote her best powers to showing the expense of spirit in a waste of selfish, neurotic daydreaming. Two of the women are middle-aged and have actual memories of Guy, who was the husband of one and cousin of the other. The third is a girl of twenty, who finds a packet of letters written by Guy, and out of these constructs her fantasies. Hurt and haunted, these women create a poisonous air about themselves that, like the hot Irish summer of the story, threatens to stifle their humanity. Miss Bowen achieves this atmosphere thoroughly but economically. When the time comes to dramatize the collapse of the women's dream, she writes a strange, agonized scene in which Big Ben tolls the hour of nine over a small battery radio, causing the women to understand that time is precious and passing, and that a reckoning is at hand.

Miss Bowen's sensibility is both intense and embracing; her intelligence, however, functions primarily *inside* this story, so bent upon illuminating every object nearby that sometimes it squanders itself on a tiny flutter and misses an important cause or consequence. There are moments, in this novel as in much of her writing, when she seems to be carried away by her insight, or perhaps by her style. It—insight or style—is always hard at work, but at times one feels it should be put to better use. We could do without the obelisk that stands in front of the house, so arbitrarily symbolic; we could do with further information about that packet of letters. A few more major explanations are needed, and a few less minor ones.

"There is in us a world of Love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world that should be . . . Do you not feel yourself drawn by the expectation and desire of some Great Thing?" The quotation which introduces the novel, is from Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*. Though that suggests St. Augustine's "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee," love in this story is confined to our natural world, indeed is given a cavalier tweak on the nose in the final sentence, borrowed from "As You Like It"! Still, and despite serious gaucheries of style, this is an intelligent and beautiful novel.

The Days of an Emperor

HADRIAN'S MEMOIRS. By Marguerite Yourcenar. Translated by Grace Frick. Farrar, Straus. $4.

By JOSEPH H. McMAHON

THE popularity of the historical novel as a literary form lends itself to some serious investigation in so far as the aesthetic of the novel is concerned. At a time when other art forms are groping into new territories, the drama and the novel, with some notable exceptions, have relied on traditional modes or, as in the case of many historical narratives, have sought novelty in the recreation of the past, hoping through the use of a bygone age to restore luster to an overworked form. It is a tribute to Mlle. Yourcenar's craftmanship that her well-documented book has avoided these pitfalls and succeeded in demonstrating that new and exciting forms can still be found.

Hadrian's Memoirs is no simple historical excursion. Actual fact is here rooted so firmly to form that its meaning as human experience is transformed into something timeless. It matters little, in the final analysis, how Hadrian manipulated himself into the position of emperor, ruled with wisdom,

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loved with intensity and died, having restored peace to Rome. What does matter is that an old man, having lived fully and sometimes richly, has grown into a person of commanding interest. The moment at which he is seen is in the last weeks of his life: a tired ruler, rising above his capacities in the final effort of addressing a lengthy letter to the youth who will one day rule in his place. The atmosphere is one of calm—a withdrawal from involvement to a position of spectator, a kind of detachment from the lived experience and a profound interest in the meaning of this experience as a component of a later attitude of mind. But the meaning of the original experience is missed; its importance is on another level.

The prose in this novel sustains the atmosphere with the precision of a well-planned fugue, moving irrevocably towards the end with an acceptance that is not resignation, an understanding that narrowly misses being wisdom. The impression is sometimes that of eavesdropping on the ruminations of a mind flirting with profundity. The mood would be elegiac, were it not so determinedly stoic.

Somehow, though, the sense of personal involvement is never aroused. The participation in the last days of the man has been indirect; the mind has been illuminated with the conviction that here was a man worth knowing. Not to have known him, though, is no great tragedy; pity, if anything, is aroused, but compassion is never stirred; the mind is engaged more than the emotions.

Mlle. Yourcenar's ultimate failure is a very distinguished one. Few recent books have been so literate, so consummately intelligent. We believe and, in the sweep of the narrative, suspend judgments, but we do not really care and because we do not the element of greatness slips away from what might have been a very permanent achievement. And once again the incapacity of the modern novelist to involve his reader directly in the experience of his hero is demonstrated. For all its impact, *Hadrian's Memoirs* stirs only the aesthetic emotions, but it stirs them on a consistently high level. The truth of genuine beauty is present; lurking behind it, uncommunicated, is the sense of blunted human feeling, locked up in one of those dissembled rooms of an overly large palace to which Hadrian tiredly compares certain portions of his life.

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Edwin Kennebeck is on the staff of a New York publishing firm.

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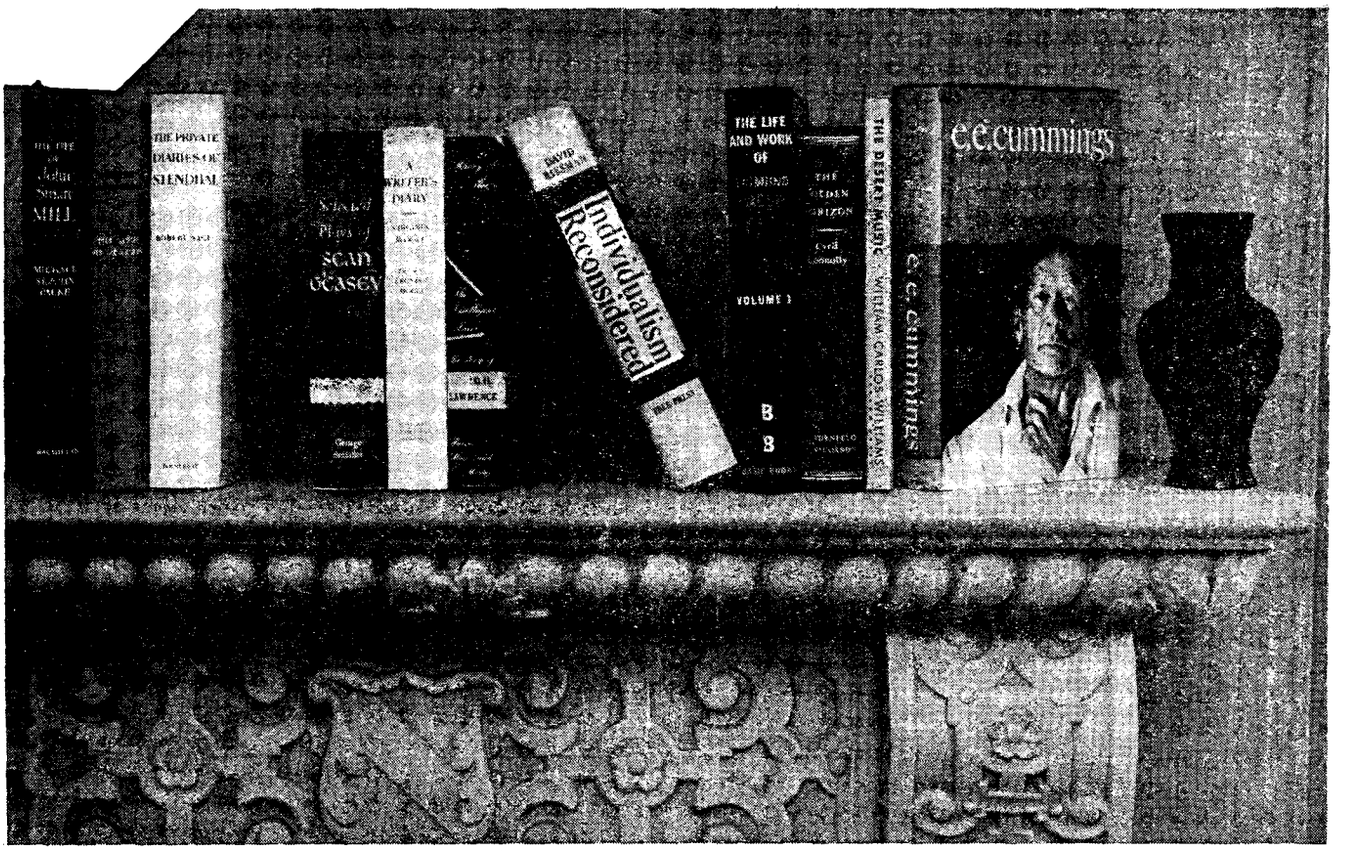

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